

# News Release



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## **Pfeiffer Big Sur Campground to be Closed, Bridges to be Removed, Due to High Risk of Winter Storm Damage**

### **Big Sur Lodge Stays Open, Campground Reopens in Spring**

California State Parks announced today that the potential for severe winter storms, mud slides, flooding and debris flows require that it close the campground at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park for the winter. The last day of camping will be Sunday October 5<sup>th</sup> with the campground closing on October 6. The Big Sur Lodge will remain open, but the campground must close, because the two bridges which provide the only access will be taken out to prevent them from being destroyed or causing other destruction downstream.

The decision to take the action comes from the strong recommendations found in the State Emergency Assessment Team (SEAT) Report, prepared by the State Office of Emergency Services. That report, prepared by specialists and experts in the fields of water, forestry, fire protection, fish and wildlife, geology and other specialties, was prepared to address the impact of severe winter weather on the nearly 240,000 acres devastated by the Basin Complex of fires in the Big Sur region this past June and July.

"People need to understand that we are only talking about the campground, not the lodge," said Monterey District Superintendent Mat Fuzie. "And as much as we dislike closing parks as popular as this one, the experts who prepared this report recommend it because the risk to human life and property is just too great to not take any action. The actions that we are taking are well thought out and intended to protect the future interests of park visitors".

Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park is situated along the banks of the Big Sur River below the confluence of Doland and Ventana Creeks. The Basin Complex fires burned so hot in places that it wiped hillsides clean of vegetation, creating highly unstable slopes throughout the watershed. Because of this, the SEAT Report states that depending on the severity of winter and spring rains, there is a high risk of destruction or major damage due to flooding, debris flows and mud slides. It further states that campsites, roads, bridges and infrastructure within

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Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park are likely to sustain moderate to major damage and actions need to be taken to reduce the risk of damages to life and property.

The report states that the Weyland Bridge forms the first point of restriction for the Big Sur River within the park, and as such is considered to be at high risk, and if breached or overtopped, could direct destructive flows throughout the park and adjacent campground. A second bridge, a Bailey bridge located further downstream and closer to Highway 1, must also be removed because it too could be washed out and do severe damage as it is propelled downstream. Both of these bridges were removed and replaced after the Marble Cone fire in the 1970's.

In addition, there is concern for the Pfeiffer Big Sur sewage treatment plant, located in an area where there is a risk from rock fall, debris slides and slumping of slopes immediately east of the facility. The facility cannot be removed, but methods to protect it are being implemented.

Further south, there is additional risk at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, situated along Highway 1, within the watershed of three local creeks. The SEAT report states that the historic Pelton wheel and the wooden bridge to McWay Falls are considered to be at high risk for damage and destruction due to flooding, debris flows, and mud slides along McWay Creek. This park and Andrew Molera State Park to the North, which has a walk in campground in the Big Sur flood plain, will be closed at the first sign of rainfall.

It should be noted that while State Parks is removing the bridges and closing the Pfeiffer Big Sur campground over the winter months, it has a project currently underway to build a new bridge and redesign future access to the campground. The schedule is for this access bridge to be completed and in place by Memorial Day 2009, the first major camping and vacation weekend of the summer season. The new bridge and main access point will not be threatened in future years due to design that places it above the 100 year flood plane.

The State parks in the Big Sur region are among the most popular visiting and camping destinations within the entire State Park system. The Pfeiffer Big Sur campground has 218 camping spaces that are always sold-out for the summer months. All of the parks in this region, Pfeiffer Big Sur, Julie Pfeiffer-Burns State Park, Andrew Molera State Park, and the John Little State Natural Reserve, attract more than 600,000 visitors to the region yearly. That many visitors, along with the thousands who enjoy Big Sur Lodge, provide a major portion of the economic revenue for this area of California.

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